

# The impacts and benefits of employing a progressive and sustained approach to outreach programmes for universities: a case study – the Progress to Success framework

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## Introduction

The focus of this chapter is the University of Derby's Progress to Success framework, a progressive, sustained outreach programme, delivered to Years 7-11 (ages 11-16) in areas of disadvantage in the City of Derby and Derbyshire. It reviews the emerging findings of the impact of the framework on widening participation learners through an examination of the framework itself; its outputs and evaluation data; the socio-economic, demographic and geographic influencing factors of the local area; and current government policy.

The framework was developed in response to government drivers to increase the number of young people accessing higher education (HE) through widening access to disadvantaged cohorts and those currently under-represented at HE level, as 'fewer than one in five young people from the most disadvantaged areas enter HE compared to more than one in two for the most advantaged areas' (Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), 2010: 1). It has been further refined in response to the deep level of social immobility within the geographic area. In November 2017, the Social Mobility Commission's (2017) *State of the Nation* report concluded that the English East Midlands offers some of the worst opportunities to young people. Derby city languished towards the bottom of the table, coming 316th out of 324 local authorities (LAs). In response to this the government has established 12 Opportunity Areas (OAs), of which Derby was one of the first (Department for Education

(DfE), 2017b). The influence of this new short-term funding stream, and that of the generously funded, but equally short-term, Office for Students (OfS) National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP), has also impacted on the framework as we begin to understand more about social mobility gaps within our locality.

A crucial element of the Progress to Success framework is the robust mixed methodology evaluation model and this chapter reviews and discusses the early findings from the framework evaluation since its inception in academic year 2015/16 (the English academic year runs from September to August the following year). The findings, in general, support the government view (Dent et al., 2014; Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), 2014; OfS, 2018a) that long-term, sustained outreach programmes have tangible influence on those learners who engage with them. There is evidence of impact on raised attainment, retained understanding of HE, improved motivation and re-engagement with learning. This view is further backed by findings from studies conducted in Australia on the effect of participation in long-term outreach programmes (Skene et al., 2016; Cuthill and Jansen, 2013).

Discussion focuses on the benefits of employing a sustained programme and of using a framework model. This helps forge disparate outreach activity into a coherent programme through five years of activities, whilst maintaining flexibility and allowing the individual building blocks of the programme to be changed without reducing the effect of the overall ‘brand’ of Progress to Success.

The chapter also addresses the challenges of programmes such as this, and there are many obstacles to navigate: accessing appropriate cohorts; issues with data consent and collection; the question of whether to employ quasi-experimental methods of evaluation, such as randomised control trials (RCTs); the limitations of long-term tracking mechanisms; and delivering sustained outreach set against changing government policy and short-term funding streams. Finally, attention is turned to the limitations of drawing wide-ranging implications for policy and practice from one small-scale review.

The concluding argument asserts that the benefits of employing a progressive and sustained framework for the delivery and evaluation of outreach activity outweigh the challenges encountered, as evidenced by the emerging findings from the case study investigation.

## **Policy context**

The University of Derby's widening access approach and philosophy has been developed in response to government concerns around the attainment of disadvantaged learners and their progression, and that of other under-represented cohorts, to HE. Our vision ensures that we focus on the needs of local cohorts, working collaboratively with local schools and other organisations to address entrenched social mobility issues within Derby city and identified areas of Derbyshire.

The Social Mobility Commission's (2017) *State of the Nation* report mapped outcomes by 324 LAs in England against 16 indicators which assessed education, employability and housing prospects in a social mobility index. Their findings showed that the East Midlands provides some of the worst opportunities in England for social progress for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, with half of the LAs in the East Midlands identified as social mobility 'cold spots'. In addition, the East Midlands is the joint lowest performer in terms of school inspection outcomes, with almost one in three secondary schools judged less than 'good'. The region also has the second lowest GCSE results in England for pupils on free school meals; in 2016 nearly 65 per cent failed to achieve grades A\* to C in English and mathematics.

The picture is particularly acute in Derby, which sees the city ranked 316th out of 324 LAs, with GCSE attainment well below the national average. We also see this within other areas of Derbyshire where we are committing resource, with all six Derbyshire LAs where we work in the bottom third of the rankings (South Derbyshire 311th, Amber Valley 302nd, Bolsover 286th, Chesterfield 285th, Erewash 278th and High Peak 233rd).

Set against this backdrop of lack of attainment and social immobility, Derby, in particular, has attracted £4.3 billion of investment since 2005 (Marketing Derby, 2018) and has the 4th fastest growing economy in the UK

(Irwin Mitchell, 2018), so it should be a place where people prosper. This juxtaposition between the economic profile of Derby and the outcomes for Derby's young people is part of the reason why the DfE made Derby an OA in October 2017. The OA aims are to bring together local stakeholders to develop tailored solutions to local education problems.

The OA partnership board, chaired by the University of Derby's Vice-Chancellor, includes educators, employers, the voluntary sector and the local council, and has prioritised increasing the number of children achieving a good level of development in the early years, raising attainment in Derby city primary and secondary schools, and ensuring that all Derby children benefit from a broad range of experiences throughout their school lives (DfE, 2017b). In response we have further refined our framework around the aims and ambitions of the OA and have used data gathered for the OA to inform our approach.

Further influence on the framework has been research from BIS (2014), and now the OfS (2018c), regarding the implementation of progressive, sustained programmes of outreach activity. Our Progress to Success framework forms a sustained outreach initiative aimed at raising the aspiration, awareness, attainment and ambitions of 'widening participation' students through a multi-intervention approach creating 'drip feed' touchpoints for cohorts of learners from Year 7 through to Year 11. This approach follows research and government guidance that a long-term approach to tackling social mobility is needed to address challenges and ensure sustainable change (Dribe et al., 2012; Dent et al., 2014; BIS, 2014; OfS, 2018a). In addition, current government policy puts some of the responsibility for improving attainment in schools firmly in the hands of universities and HE providers (BIS, 2014; OFFA/HEFCE, 2017) through monitoring institutional Access Agreements. This will continue, at least until 2019/20, through the new Access and Participation Plans, a key component of a university's registration with the OfS (2018b).

## **Methodology**

When developing the Progress to Success framework we challenged ourselves to create a programme that would reach out to pupils in local

social mobility cold spots. We took a multi-intervention approach, creating ‘drip feed’ touchpoints for cohorts of learners from Year 7 through to Year 11.

We began development of the framework in 2015, following a review of our existing outreach offer. The review emphasised that we had high quality activity which was professionally delivered and was well received by both teachers and learners. However, review respondents also highlighted that most of our offer was of ‘stand-alone’ activities with little to link them into a coherent programme, giving in essence a large, disparate offer which could be difficult to navigate and reduced the impact of our activities as we were unsure as to who we were engaging with over a number of years. This was greatly inhibiting our mission to target widening participation cohorts in schools.

Included as part of the review was research into sector best practice, comprising desk research and visits to three universities, plus the use of HEFCE toolkits and other research into ‘what works’. From this we developed an initial pilot for academic year 2015/16, which was offered to eight schools. We have continued to refine the offer and programme into its current form.

The framework is now offered to 33 schools either in whole or in part (for a small number of schools where we use Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Collaborative Outreach Partnership (DANCOP) funding to deliver activity we offer a condensed version of the framework in Years 7 and 8 (ages 11-13) and the full version in Years 9-11 (ages 13-16)). The core strand (see Table 1) ensures that at least one activity is offered in each year to the full cohort, plus there are additional activities for specific cohorts of learners; for example, the Raising the Grade events are offered to those on a grade 3/4 borderline (learners who are predicted a final grade of either a 3 or a 4, the difference between a weak and standard pass), the aim being to raise their final grade to a 4.

The core strand is underpinned by a number of supplementary strands focused on further engaging acutely under-represented target cohorts, such as looked after children and white working-class boys, with

Table 1: Core strand activities

| Year group | Activity                            | In school/on campus       |
|------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 7          | University Experience Day           | On campus                 |
| 8          | Why go to University?               | In school                 |
| 8          | Skills Swap Challenge               | On campus                 |
| 9          | Progression Pathways Workshop       | In school                 |
| 10         | University Experience Day           | On campus                 |
| 10         | Residential Summer School           | On campus                 |
| 10         | Family Celebration and Awards Event | Either, decided by school |
| 11         | Wellbeing Works Workshop            | In school                 |
| 11         | Spring Forward                      | Either, decided by school |
| 11         | Raising the Grade English and Maths | On campus                 |

additional activity. For Years 7 and 8 we work with whole year groups, before identifying around 100 pupils who become the core target cohort for Years 9-11. This cohort is identified as those who have the ability to achieve a minimum of 5 grade 4s or above at GCSE and who fit one or more widening participation criteria.

Incorporated throughout the programme is a robust evaluation framework, including an illustrative logic model, which focuses on both short and long-term data collection at key points within a learner's journey through Key Stages 3 and 4 (Key Stages are the four fixed stages into which the English National Curriculum is divided; Key Stages 3 and 4 cover ages 11-16). In addition, we are a partner in the East Midlands Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Partnership (EMWPREP) and use their tracking service to determine the levels of progression into HE. The findings from the evaluation help shape the programme to ensure continued relevance, underpin our understanding of the impact of the framework and measure the progression and other success criteria of the young people who engage with us.

Evaluation data give us a rich seam of understanding in terms of the impact of activities, and as such we collect data through a diverse range of mechanisms, including:

- Baseline surveys in Year 7 with follow up surveys in Years 9 and 10
- Surveys to measure distance travelled and knowledge tests
- Focus groups in Year 8
- Teacher evaluation in Years 7, 9 and 11
- Individual event evaluation (learners and teachers)
- Attainment data
- Reflective diaries

We review all evaluation data as a whole to build a comprehensive picture of the Progress to Success framework in our outreach annual report and we also review specific elements; this shows some real successes for the framework.

## Findings

In summary, over the 2016/17 academic year, there were 58 Progress to Success activities and 2991 individual learners engaging with the framework. Of these learners:

- 82.8 per cent were from POLAR3 quintiles 1 and 2 postcodes (POLAR – Participation of Local Areas – classifies postcode areas based on the proportion of the young population that participates in HE. Those living in quintiles 1 and 2 postcode areas are the 40 per cent least likely to progress to HE)
- 51.4 per cent were from Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintiles 4 and 5 postcodes (40 per cent most deprived nationally)
- 25.7 per cent were eligible for free school meals
- 46.8 per cent were male
- 17.1 per cent were from a Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) background
- 5.2 per cent declared a disability

- 1.7 per cent were looked after children or care experienced.

Our key evaluation findings can be grouped under overarching themes as detailed in the following sections.

## **Evidence of distance travelled**

Our evaluation surveys include a number of impact questions to test distance travelled. These questions are mirrored before and after an activity or series of activities, or over a number of years to highlight changes in understanding, motivation to learn and ambition. Table 2 is an example of evaluation results following the Year 7 activities.

As can be seen, there is a good level of positive movement with regard to the question around going to university, with a 16 percentage-point increase. However, where we see substantial impact is around the knowledge question, with a significant 55 percentage point increase. This illustrates the real impact that these activities are having and gives us a solid baseline from which to build further activity during the next four years of the framework.

## **Evidence of retained understanding**

An important element of the evaluation structure is to test for the retention of knowledge about university following a gap in activities. This is undertaken up to 6 months after the Year 7 activities through focus group activity. It is conducted by staff from EMWPREP to ensure impartiality. Due to the intensive nature of both the set-up and evaluation of focus groups (FGs) they are conducted with a cross-section of learners rather than the full cohort. In 2016/17 60 Year 8 learners from 2 schools took part. Key findings included:

- Some learners needed reminding at first to help recall the specific activities, getting them confused with those undertaken by other providers.
- Once focused the learners were able to offer valuable insight, with the majority of participants citing the Experience Day as the most memorable activity.



Table 2: Results of impact questions on Year 7 evaluations

|  | Are you thinking about going to university?<br>(‘Yes’ figure is shown) |       | Please rate your level of knowledge relating to university (‘good knowledge’ and ‘very good knowledge’ figure is shown) |       |
|--|--|-------|---|-------|
|  | Before   | After | Before  | After |
| Average of all schools that engaged in Year 7 activities | 69%  | 85%   | 26%   | 81%   |

- ‘When I went I thought it was going to be completely different and I had a view in my head about what it was going to look like and then when I went in it was completely different, so it was good to explore round’ (FG participant, School B).
- Overall feedback about the Progress to Success programme was positive.
- All focus group participants had heard of university and were able to give a good description of what university is like.
- Focus group participants reported that the framework helped change their perceptions of university and increase their confidence, showing them that university is not as intimidating as it may seem and that it is accessible to them.
- Some stated that they felt more motivated at school to get the grades required to go to university.
- Undergraduate student ambassadors had a positive influence on the learners and were often cited as the best thing about taking part in the activities.
- The learners had thought about learning and teaching styles at university and were keen to experience a university lecture.

- There were additional questions raised by the participants showing concerns about some aspects of university. Examples include: ‘If you don’t like your roommate, can you move to another room?’ (FG participant, School B) and ‘If you decide that you have chosen the wrong subject, are you able to stop the subject you are doing and study another subject?’ (FG participant, School A).

What is illustrated through the focus groups is that Progress to Success activities had successfully introduced HE concepts, which could be recalled later, changed perceptions of university positively, and increased learner confidence and motivation to learn. Feedback such as this is also vital to inform the continued development of activities.

## **Evidence of raised attainment**

There are two elements to our tracking of impact on attainment, long-term and short-term. In academic year 2017/18 we started to collect attainment data in Year 9 for the target cohort in those schools willing to share it, which we will revisit in Year 11. However, GCSE attainment outcomes for this cohort will not be available for a number of years. In the meantime we have developed short-term attainment tracking datasets based around a number of our specific strands of activity such as the Raising the Grade programme and our white working-class boys programme.

### **Raising the Grade**

Maths and English Raising the Grade events provide an intensive day of revision activity, comprising six days throughout the year (three maths and three English) each offering four modules addressing different areas of the curriculum. The aim of the Raising the Grade programme is to give learners predicted a grade 3 at GCSE a boost to attain a grade 4 or above. During 2016/17 228 learners from 13 schools took part in maths and 190 learners from 10 schools took part in English. Evaluation findings for maths included:

- 63 per cent of participants went on to achieve at least a grade 4
- 76 per cent of participants said that the day helped to increase their understanding of maths

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- 70 per cent of participants said the day had inspired them to continue with their maths revision
- ‘A day which allows the students to practice key skills in an environment which makes them feel special’ (Teacher)

For English they included:

- 68 per cent of participants, who we received final grades for, achieved a grade 4 or above
- 88 per cent of students felt inspired to continue their revision
- 82 per cent of students rated their knowledge of English as good or excellent at the end of the day, compared with 11 per cent at the beginning of the events
- ‘The funniest day of revision and learning’ (Student)

The numbers attaining a grade 4 or above are higher than expected and significantly higher than our target of 50 per cent.

## **Evidence of improved motivation and re-engagement in learning**

Another key aspect of the framework is to work with disengaged learners to improve their motivation in the classroom and to re-engage them in learning. This is difficult to quantify, as there are many contributory factors when considering a learner’s motivations and engagement. However, we do have some evidence, particularly in qualitative forms, which indicates that the framework does address these issues, for instance, the results from the white working-class boys programme.

This programme has a very narrow focus, engaging with between 10-12 boys in a small number of schools (currently 3). We ask schools to select ‘under the radar’ boys who are neither high attaining nor very disruptive, but who are demotivated in class and are not realising their full potential. The programme in brief consists of six months of activity: an inspirational activity (for instance, caving); a series of six in-school workshops covering a range of topics; revision sessions either in school or on campus; and an on-campus activity day. The aims of the programme are for participants to

build personal confidence and self-esteem, and recognise skills/qualities and be able to demonstrate them. Evaluation of their completed reflective diaries revealed a transformational impact on a group who had previously become withdrawn and disenfranchised in school:

I need to change my attitude to [school] work. (Diary entry, Learner 1)

I enjoyed learning the good things about me. (Diary entry, Learner 2)

This has helped me feel better about myself. (Diary entry, Learner 3)

In addition, interviews with the learners' teachers show they were able to work more effectively with the boys in the classroom as a result of participation.

Evaluation of the framework is based upon robust data, providing clear evidence of the impact achieved through this programme of work. However, the statistics are brought to life by feedback from individual learners and their stories about how the framework has benefitted them. These learners are our local young people, who face enormous barriers and challenges to learning and attainment. Our aim is to provide transformational educational experiences through outreach and this framework enables us to deliver this vision.

## **Discussion**

There is emerging strong evidence from the framework to support the view that progressive, sustained outreach programmes over a period of a number of years can have proven impacts on learners in attainment, motivation and understanding. This is supported by research, such as that by BIS (2014), which documented a range of outreach programme case studies from across the UK as part of the development of its *National strategy for access and student success in HE*. The work asserted that 'Outreach is most effective when it is a progressive, sustained programme of activity and engagement over time' (BIS, 2014: 16). This view is further supported by case studies of long-term widening participation research undertaken

in other countries, most notably Australia. For example, a case-study conducted by Skene et al. (2016: 19) on the Aspire UWA programme delivered by the University of Western Australia, concludes that ‘Aspire UWA demonstrates the attributes of a highly effective widening participation program...through its early, long-term and sustained focus’. Cuthill and Jansen’s (2013: 20) initial impact report regarding the University of Queensland’s six-year Young Achiever Program indicates that it is having ‘empowering effects for the young people and their families’.

This approach has been acknowledged widely across the HE sector, moving from HEFCE developing outreach toolkits, which, whilst not regulatory, urged practitioners to plan programmes that were ‘as learner-centred as possible and part of a progressive and integrated programme’ (Dent et al., 2014: 9), to the OfS (2018a: 13), which tasked NCOPs with ‘developing programmes of sustained and progressive outreach that are appropriate to the needs and aspirations of the young people living in their allocated target areas’. In addition, emerging evidence suggests that the mixed methodology evaluation approach, which we employ to underpin the framework, gives a more robust evidence base. Recent work by Thiele et al. (2018: 32) acknowledges that, whilst not yet commonplace, a mixed methods approach can ‘help build the more compelling evidence base that is needed in this field’, ‘this field’ referring to widening participation initiatives.

Another benefit of employing a framework model is that the framework itself has been built specifically with long-term use and flexibility in mind. Progress to Success provides the ‘brand’ and each separate element is easily changeable without diminishing the value of the overall programme. Therefore, as our learning grows we are able to amend discrete elements whilst Progress to Success gives continuity; it also means the framework can be reactive to government policy changes. An exemplar is our previously offered Revision Techniques workshop which was amended to a Wellbeing Works workshop. This placed a focus on mindfulness and reducing exam anxiety due to feedback from teachers that wellbeing is a key concern, and research indicating that exam stress and anxiety is rising in young people (for example, Childline delivered 3135 counselling sessions on exam stress in 2016/17 – a rise of 11 per cent over the previous 2 years (National

Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), 2017)). This adaptability brings sustainability to our approach to outreach activity.

## **Challenges and limitations**

Despite the benefits of employing a framework approach to outreach and the success we have had so far with Progress to Success, there are a number of key challenges we have either had to overcome, or, indeed, are still striving to overcome.

### **Access to learners through schools**

Most activity within the framework relies on accessing learners and data through engagement with school staff, and therefore the relationships we develop with staff are vital and can make or break our work. School staff are time poor and can be inundated with providers offering outreach leading to ‘initiative fatigue’ (Hurst and Axtell, 2016; Reeves, 2010; Bubb and Earley, 2009), and yet we need buy-in for the framework to access the learners repeatedly. To counter this we have developed the framework with support and input from teachers, to make it an attractive proposition, and to address challenges which they have within Key Stages 3 and 4, such as increasing attainment and dealing with reductions in careers support (in January 2016, Careers England reported ‘five out of six schools were providing less careers help to their students’).

We also encounter issues when a Year 8 cohort moves to Year 9 and we reduce the numbers that we work with from a whole year cohort to a smaller cohort. As there is no universal agreement on who is a disadvantaged or widening participation student, HE commonly works with datasets that are used very little in secondary education. Whilst some measures, such as free school meals, are widely understood, others, such as POLAR and IMD classifications, are not. We reduce some of the workload of identifying the correct learners from schools by asking them to provide learners’ postcodes and we assess the data for them. In addition, for some of our strands of activity, the target cohort is not clearly defined, and therefore is difficult for schools to identify. An example of this is white, working-class boys, the issues of identification being picked up by Hunter et al. (2018: 42-43) who state, ‘there remains a deficit of clear guidance on

how to define the target group of white British students from low-socio-economic-status groups’ and assert, ‘It is vital that policy makers provide more considered guidance’. However, in the absence of such guidance, we focus on how we guide the school to identify the cohorts and how we analyse the data on the learners that we access.

Challenges do not end once we have identified the cohort, as we then need to make sure we are accessing the same groups through Years 9, 10 and 11. This can be difficult due to working with different Heads of Year or other key contacts. We try to minimise this difficulty by providing the lists of identified cohorts to schools for reference, or by working with one key contact to implement the entire framework.

We also encounter difficulties accessing learners in Year 11, who are essentially a ‘protected species’, with schools very reluctant to allow them off timetable for any activity. Due to this we now undertake our final full cohort evaluation survey at the end of Year 10, and focus Year 11 on attainment raising or anxiety reduction activity, which directly benefits the learners in their final year of GCSE study.

### **Access to data/GDPR**

Proving our programme works is vital. We are assessed both internally and externally, but particularly by the OfS, on our ability to show the impact we have on the learners we engage with. However, this is beset with issues relating to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the sharing of data (GDPR is a legal framework that sets guidelines for the collection and processing of personal information of individuals within the European Union (Frankenfield, 2019)). Schools have had a range of reactions since the new regulations came into force, from no real change to how they share data to complete lockdown on our use of any data relating to their pupils, including anonymised information. Nevertheless, the OfS is still intent on proving success by monitoring both impact and tracking data (OfS, 2018c, 2018d; OFFA/HEFCE, 2017). To counter this we are in the process of putting in place data sharing agreements with all schools, but this is time consuming as each agreement is individually negotiated and can involve not just the school but also the LA or their multi-academy trust (MAT).

To be able to track a learner's outcomes long-term we use the EMWPREP tracking service. The use of tracking systems to show outcomes is now commonplace within English universities and can be essential to access funding such as NCOP (OfS, 2018e). There are significant benefits to using a tracking service: economies of scale/cost efficiency; collective influences for engaging with organisations (LAs/HESA); comparison with other providers for benchmarking; sharing best practice and creating collaborative partnerships; and increased understanding about progression and outcomes. However, there are also downsides: final outcomes are only tracked at ages 18 and 19, and so those who make a later decision to attend HE are not counted; only learners who go to a UK institution are tracked, therefore we have no data for those who may study abroad; and there is currently no mechanism for tracking those who go on to a higher apprenticeship, a valid and valued HE progression route. Yet, there is also a more fundamental issue. To enter data into the EMWPREP database we need the learner, or their parent/carer if they are under 13, to complete a consent form several times during the programme and we are reliant on their agreement to do this; if they choose not to, we cannot track their outcomes, and therefore prove our impact.

### **The Office for Students and other funding bodies**

One final challenge of note is the contrast between the OfS's requirement to employ long-term progressive outreach programmes on the one hand, and their changing focus on which under-represented cohorts we should be targeting activity toward on the other. Interest in each of these groups can sometimes be short-term, before government funding moves on to the next dataset of disadvantage. For instance, NCOP funding is very generous but highly targeted (OfS, 2018f) and indicators from recent OfS briefings (not yet in print) are that beyond July 2021 it will not be continued in its current form. This may significantly impact on how we take forward our framework in the future and also poses the question, what happens to those who are partway through our DANCOP funded strand of activity?

### **Limitations of our findings**

There are, of course, limitations to our findings; for example, we do not employ quasi-experimental methods, such as RCTs, in our activities or



incorporate them within our evaluation framework. This is not to say that it is not something for us to consider in the future, particularly as a collaborative venture; however, at this point, to a small outreach team, it is a costly activity, in terms of both time and resource. Plus, the challenges associated with using RCTs in a social science context, including the ethical implications, are well documented (Gale, 2018; Hayton and Stevenson, 2018; Bryman, 2016). We would need to assess and consider these challenges thoroughly, and the benefits (perceived or otherwise) of using an RCT over our current mixed methodology evaluation model, before embarking on such a study.

There are also issues in finding the balance between quantitative data evaluation and qualitative data evaluation techniques. We employ both methodologies within the framework, and their pros and cons are well documented in any basic research methods textbook. Our challenges relate more to what information we are asked to provide to the OfS to prove impact and ‘value for money’ (OfS, 2018g), which is often focused on numerical data and progress against targets rather than qualitative data. In addition, further questions are raised such as what is the definition of value for money? How do we prove value for money for a resource-intensive activity for a small number of learners which shows limited impact in terms of quantitative data but a fundamental impact on a learner’s motivation or enjoyment of learning through qualitative feedback? Finally, how do we overcome data sharing and GDPR hurdles to gather enough data to satisfy the OfS (2018b) requirements for evidence?

Despite the challenges we face and the limitations of our small-scale review, there are a number of valid conclusions we can draw from our results.

## Summary

This chapter has focused on an overview of the University of Derby’s Progress to Success framework, a progressive, sustained outreach programme, delivered to Years 7-11 in areas of disadvantage in Derby city and across Derbyshire. The chapter has set the context within which the framework programme is delivered, analysing both government policy

and position and the socio-economic, demographic and geographic influencing factors of the local area.

The emerging findings support research suggesting that a long-term, sustained programme does positively impact on disadvantaged young people and our evidence points to raised attainment, retained understanding of HE, improved motivation and re-engagement with learning. As the framework beds in over the coming years this body of evidence will increase and we will be able to use it to make further improvements to the framework and further suppositions about the impact of our outreach work which we will be keen to share with strategists, policy-makers and practitioners.

However, the chapter also demonstrates the challenges which outreach practitioners face every day to deliver programmes such as Progress to Success to learners. There is no one magic element which addresses entrenched social immobility and attempts to level the playing field, a view echoed by Major and Machin (2018: 151) who note, ‘there is no one panacea that will magically enhance social mobility. Life is just not that simple’. What is required is sustained effort, including many years of input, working with young people on an individual level to find what fires their imagination, grows their self-belief and fills in the knowledge gap. To do that we need to overcome a multitude of issues: working with schools to ensure access to the right cohorts; gaining consent for data collection and the sharing of data, which is hugely problematic but is also currently crucial to how government assesses our success at impacting young lives; and working to the short-term nature of some funding streams, which appears in juxtaposition to government rhetoric regarding the engagement of learners in the long-term.

In final conclusion, this has been a small-scale review of one university’s widening access outreach programme. However, emerging findings evidenced by this review indicate that there are significant and explicit benefits of employing a progressive and sustained framework for the delivery and evaluation of outreach activity. These benefits far outweigh the challenges encountered, which can, to a greater or lesser extent, be addressed through careful planning, robust processes and a strong

evaluation model. This chapter reflects a pragmatic standpoint, putting forward a model developed by skilled practitioners, who understand the complexities of engagement with teachers and different cohorts of learners through lived experience. This aspect can sometimes be lost within academic discussion of widening participation, which often puts policy, research or production of evidence as the key driver, creating a gap in knowledge in how practitioners interpret policy into practice. The chapter illustrates how taking a progressive and sustained framework approach to outreach can ensure that programmes encompass activity that is ultimately deliverable but also reactive to policy and policy change, and can embed a rigorous evaluation model to create a valid body of impact evidence. Therefore, whilst no claims can be made for wide-reaching implications for outreach programmes across the UK, it is hoped that other providers and practitioners can find the chapter valuable for informing their own practice.

To address the questions posed within the chapter, for the benefit of the sector the following areas for further research are proposed: key influences on young people's career/progression decision making; the impact of GDPR on the sharing of data; measuring success and impact using qualitative methods; the use of RCTs and quasi-experimental methods of evaluation in comparison to mixed methodology models of evaluation; value for money in resource intensive outreach work; and the impact on learners of the withdrawal of public funds for outreach.

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## *Transformative Higher Education – Access, Inclusion & Lifelong Learning*

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